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THE EVOLUTION OF COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE
IN THE U.S. MILITARY. THE SECOND SEMINOLE
PHILIPPINE AND VIETNAM WARS. DID WE LEARN OUR LESSONS?

BY

WILLIAM RECTOR
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SEMINAR 5

REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Evolution of Counterrevolutionary Doctrine in the U.S. Military. The Second Seminole, Philippine and Vietnam Wars. Did we learn our lessons?

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The United States has been involved in numerous guerrilla and counterrevolutionary wars in its history. American policy and interests have charted the course for our involvement in these wars around the world. The question then arises, that if American interests determine its continued involvement in guerrilla wars around the globe, do we have a military doctrine prepared to deal with this types of wars. The operational and tactical lessons learned in previous conflicts must be studied in order to form a basis for future doctrine.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mr. Rector is a GS-15 with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Mr. Rector has been interested in Counterrevolutionary doctrine and Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) since 1980. Mr. Rector has had several overseas and domestic assignments for the CIA. Mr. Rector has a B.B.A. from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Mr. Rector is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1993.

Introduction

The United States has fought numerous wars, both large and small against outnumbered and outgunned adversaries. Enemies using unconventional methods, have been able to frustrate and confound our military. Some of these wars (the Philippine War, the Punitive Expedition into Mexico, etc.) have become mere footnotes in the history. A study of these forgotten wars can help develop military doctrine and professional capacity to accommodate with the intricacies of dealing with unconventional warfare.

The Air War College has defined doctrine as; "Fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application." (18:13) The purpose of this paper will be to analyze the evolution of counterrevolutionary/unconventional experience and the doctrinal lessons that should have been learned. The paper will specifically address the Second Seminole, Philippine, and Vietnam Wars. These conflicts represent different circumstances ranging from the subjugation of a nation bent on autonomy to the attempted prevention of the Communist takeover of a Southeast Asian nation. They also have several common features that provide the opportunity for comparative analysis. This report consists of the following sections for each war; (1) Background, (2) Political/Military situation, (3) Conflict, and (4) Lessons learned. This paper will show we have not learned our lessons in regard to counterrevolutionary doctrine, especially at the senior leadership levels.

Footnote: For the purpose of this paper "counterrevolutionary", unconventional, and counterinsurgency are used interchangeably.

The Second Seminole War

Background

American politics were going through a state of transition during the first half of the 19th century. Prior to 1828 the president was selected in a caucus in Washington D.C.. The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 was the first time that the popular vote played a role in a Presidential election.

Jackson used this popular mandate to justify his aggressive Indian policy. Two major pieces of legislation demonstrated Jackson's attitude toward the Indians, and provided the underpinnings of his Indian policy. Although Jackson was mistrustful of a strong central government and was generally convinced that the individual states were the proper tool for most governmental activity, he was nevertheless committed to the union. These beliefs combined with his western orientation, gave Jackson the justification to secure the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and later the Indian Intercourse Act of 1834. These acts provided for the trade of Indian lands in the east for land west of the Mississippi, and the establishment of a series of forts to keep them on their land. (16:30) While directed against the Cherokee Nations, these two pieces of legislation reflected Jackson's attitude toward the Indians that ultimately sparked the Second Seminole War. The primary cause of the Second Seminole War, however, was the Indian removal policy followed by the Jackson Administration. The intent of this policy was to move (or remove) the Indians from their land and resettle them west of the Mississippi river. In sum, the state and federal governments coveted the land occupied by the Indians. The Second Seminole War started in 1835 and ended in 1842.

Political/Military Situation

The relationship between the political and military structure is of paramount importance. Clausewitz defined this relationship with his statement; "War is just an extension of policy by

violent means." What was the political-military relationship during the Jackson presidency? Did President Jackson have popular support for the War? The policies and programs of the federal government made it clear that their intention was to clear the land east of the Mississippi of Indians, or at the very least gain control of the lands occupied by the Indians. Overall Jackson received strong public support for his Indian policy. The South and Southwest supported it because it was to rid them of what was in their view an inferior population that was an obstacle to the white man's advancement. "Moreover Jackson's view that the states had sovereignty over their own lands and population nurtured the idea of states' rights and lessened the fear of a tyrannical central government." (16:32) Although domestic criticism emerged, much of it revolved around the perceived lack or vigorous pursuit of Indian removal. (16:32)

The relationship between the political structure and the military was complex and adversarial at times. America has traditionally demobilized after a war, and the demobilization process that occurred after the War of 1812, led to a decline in military personnel and resources. At the beginning of the Second Seminole War many military issues also became politicized. For example, one issue that became politicized in Congress was the of the role of citizen-soldiers in the regular army establishment. (16:32) Some congressmen felt that the regulars should be removed from Florida so that the militia could do the job. Politics affected the command of military forces as each side accused the other of supporting commanders affiliated with their political party. For example, the Army generals affiliated with the opposition Whig party generally favored the use of the Regular Army using conventional European battle tactics. The Jacksonian Army generals favored the use of Militia and Regulars, and were more flexible in developing strategy and tactics. In the end, several generals were removed, which influenced the conduct of the war. (16:29) The Secretary of War Lewis Cass supplied additional friction to the conflict by inserting his opinions. He thought the Seminoles a nuisance "and could be contained, he thought, by building a series of forts supported by active military patrols." (12:118)

Although public support for the war was evident, there was a disconnect between the political and military objectives. The government's political objective was to remove the Indians

from their land and move them west of the Mississippi. While senior U.S. Military and War Department leaders downplayed the significance of the war, field commanders were engaged in an all out guerrilla war against a fierce enemy. As Clausewitz pointed out, the better political and military objectives match, the easier it is to pursue the war. This was not the case in the Second Seminole War. The leadership misunderstood not only the nature of the conflict, but also the enemy's determination. Effective presidential leadership was not maintained throughout the course of the conflict (to our political leaders it was just a side show). This lack of attention had the effect of minimizing and disregarding doctrinal lessons learned because of the military's attitude towards the Seminoles (that they were insignificant and could be contained). Now let us take a look at the true nature of the conflict.

Conflict

The Second Seminole war confronted the United States with its first major unconventional war. Many elected officials and military leaders (such as Secretary of War Lewis Cass and Whig and Jacksonian congressmen), believed the Seminoles in Florida posed no threat and that the uprising would be quickly resolved. As Sam C. Sarkesian points out in America's Forgotten Wars, "This proved erroneous however and the conflict quickly became difficult and deadly, as the Seminoles fought in defense of their land and way of life." (16:155)

The military retained its conventional posture that mimicked the European structure. "The professionalization of the American officer corps was preparing the Army to fight with the new skill in any campaigns of the kind conventional in the European world. It did not serve so well as preparation for unconventional, irregular war." (19:160) Was this train of thought wrong for the time? Given the circumstances and nature of the world, no. The United States expected to fight a European enemy. This is a trend the U. S. has repeated throughout its history.

During the opening phases of the war the Army followed conventional European doctrine and battle drill. "American officers deployed their troops in conventional columns and enveloping

movements." (16:156) This employment backed up the existing use of European conventional doctrine. The outcome of these tactics was generally one disaster after another. The Seminoles used ambushes and raids against small detachments of forces or white settlements and generally disappeared into the brush when faced with a larger force. (16:157) As one officer described going into battle with General Scott and his use columns; "To my view the most prominent cause of failure was to be found in the nature of the terrain, so well adapted to the guerrilla warfare which the Indians carry on, providing them cover and concealment for ambushes and speed of movement and slowness to us." (4:145) There was a complete lack of mobility and coordination of communications in their columns. The logistics support was also exceedingly difficult. It was almost impossible to keep the wagons moving through the dense underbrush and swamp furthermore the Seminoles were also fighting in their own backyard. "The enemy knew every nook and cranny of the terrain." (16:156)

Lessons Learned

The question then arises "What did we learn?" Later in the conflict (approximately 1840-41), however, the military realized later in the war that the terrain and climate favored the Indians and were ill-suited for their conventional doctrine. The military changed their tactics, "They abandoned the use of columns and replaced them with more mobile and smaller detachments that veered off from the main force to engage Indian bands." (16:156) Colonel William J. Worth (who succeeded Colonel Zachary Taylor) improved on Colonel Taylor's idea of dividing the area into districts, establishing stockades and garrisons in each district, and sending out patrols to comb the district on alternate days. Colonel Worth, tiring of the chase, also planned to hunt down the enemy's dwellings and crops and destroy his means of subsistence. To do this he campaigned straight through the hot months, to keep the Seminoles from raising or harvesting their crops. Although the cost to his own troops was high, this made the Seminoles break into small bands that could barely subsist. (7:162) The implementation of this strategy eventually made the Seminoles combat ineffective. In Clausewitzian terms he had located their "center of gravity".

The Army stumbled onto one other effective method, which was the capture of the main guerrilla leaders. General Jessup who was to become more infamous than famous because his tactic involved ignoring flags of truce, captured the Seminole leader Osceola. This severely hindered the Seminoles, because he was their greatest tactician and strongest leader. (12:214-216)

As we can see the field Army did learn its lessons and these "lessons learned" provided them with the means to defeat the Seminoles. They threw their existing doctrine away and came up with new tactics to fight an unconventional war. These tactics were: create small mobile units, establish yourself in the enemy's territory, control the local populace, harass him by not allowing him a rest, and destroy his support base and will to fight. Lastly, as pointed out, the Army stumbled onto the tactic of neutralizing the enemy leadership. However, little importance was placed on it due to the ungentlemanly nature of it. These tactics were employed quite effectively by the U.S. Army in its "pacification" of the Indians west of the Mississippi following the Civil War. Unfortunately, we had difficulty carrying these lessons beyond our borders as the next two examples indicate.

The Philippine War

Background

The United State's involvement in the Philippines was an outgrowth of the Spanish-American War. After defeating the Spanish relatively quickly in Cuba, the government took up the debate about the Philippines (a Spanish colony). There was much debate against our involvement by anti-imperialists in the U.S. Secretary of State John Hay however, wrote that "The sentiment in the United States is almost universal that the people of the Philippines whatever else is done, must be liberated from Spanish domination. In this sentiment the President McKinley fully concurs." (10:37) The real underlying causes appear to be economics (trade and sea lanes in support of our trade with China) and a growing belief in the military and strategic arguments of the new manifest destiny doctrine. Thus we fought the Philippine War from 1899 to 1914. (16:42-48)

Political/Military Situation

The political/military situation during the Philippine War was a complex one. The U.S. Government came out of the Spanish-American War in Cuba with broad public support. In fact the President was actually criticized (in public) for not aggressively challenging the Spanish quickly enough. (16:55) The strong support of the Spanish-American War was not as evident with the Philippine venture. "There was increasing opposition to the acquisition of the Philippines as an American colony. The Anti-Imperialist League seriously questioned this policy and raised voices against the behavior of American troops in quelling the Filipinos." The reason for this opposition was that many politically active citizens did not want the United States to become a colonial power. This was in their mind a betrayal to our heritage. (16:55)

Another problem arose between political and military leaders; what was the stated objective of the government? "To President McKinley, the advantages of keeping his future choices open more than outweighed the complaints of the subordinates who had to execute his vague policies.

When the commander of the expedition, Maj. Gen. Wesley Merrit, bluntly asked McKinley whether it was his desire to subdue and hold all of the Spanish territory in the islands or merely to seize and hold the capital, the President declined to comment." (11:1-2) The focus of world events shifted however to the tensions in Europe and domestic issues, thus shifting attention from the Philippines. The struggle became more of a "pacification" and "law and order" issue in official Washington's mind. (16:51)

Once again we see a disconnect between the political and military objectives. In this case the military received no guidance from the President, and later the issue was downgraded to a "law and order/pacification" issue. Clearly Clausewitz's concept of harmony of the political and military objective was violated. Also, the support of the people had not been secured. However, this did not have a major impact, as the Army primarily used regular forces (thus not affecting the general population). Once again the senior government leadership misunderstood the nature of the conflict. They downplayed its importance and failed to provide the resources necessary to fight it. Later, this would downgrade the significance to any doctrinal lessons learned because our senior military and civilian leadership perceived the United States as a political and military power. This belief (or arrogance) provided the basis for the perception the enemy was insignificant and could be easily overcome with limited resources. This belief led our military leadership to believe there could not be any long lasting doctrinal lessons learned from a conflict with such an insignificant opponent.

Conflict

The Philippine-American War, as mentioned above, was primarily fought with American Regulars. A "conventional" war was fought at the outbreak in 1899. "Filipino revolutionary forces used trench warfare and massed troops against American forces." (16:168) The battle of Manila was typical of this phase of the war. The Filipino forces lead by Emilio Aguinaldo had built extensive entrenchments and redoubts and engaged the Americans in trench warfare. The

Americans also operated in a conventional mode, the tactics and doctrine still built upon the European model without any significant change in doctrine since the Civil War. (19:307-309) The American forces advanced on the entrenched Filipino positions with frontal assaults with support from artillery and naval gunfire. Considering the large scale of some of the battles, American casualties were light. In the Battle of Manila we suffered 59 killed and 278 wounded versus an estimated 3,000 total casualties for the Filipinos. (16:169) This was probably due to overwhelming firepower and poor discipline among the Filipino Revolutionaries.

Immediately following the Battle of Manila, the American Forces went on the offensive, and every time the Filipinos employed conventional tactics they were defeated. The Americans eventually captured Aguinaldo's capital city of Malolos. U.S. General Elwell Otis believed the war was over. It was at this point Aguinaldo met with his advisors and decided to disband his army and shift to guerrilla tactics. (16:170)

General Elwell Otis, the Army commander, continued to employ conventional tactics based upon Army doctrine. The Army did not try to retain territory. They would strike into an area where they believed the revolutionaries were operating and then return to their garrison in Manila. The guerrillas would ambush them, hide and then return to the areas the Army vacated. If these tactics sound familiar they should, General Otis "used the equivalent to modern search and destroy tactics." (21:240) General Otis also enjoyed the same success with these tactics as we did in the later Vietnam conflict: we held no territory; we did not win over the population; morale declined; we engaged at the enemy's convenience; and suffered attrition.

Lessons Learned

What did the Americans do? What did they learn and how did their strategy change? "Much of their (U.S. forces) fighting came to be guerrilla warfare, a style they had to teach themselves with great difficulty against the Seminole Indians in 1835-42 and now had to teach themselves again." (19:307) Major General Douglas Mac Arthur arrived in the Philippines and

devised a new pacification policy aimed at isolating the guerrillas from their logistical and support bases and to break the bond between the villages(ers) and the guerrillas. The plan called for a native government to be established after the capture of a town, thus assuming the Filipinos would want to govern themselves under American protection. As we would later relearn this was a cosmetic and unrealistic approach to counterrevolution. "In many instances the same officials employed by the Americans were also serving guerrilla units." (22:122) Thus the "Filipinos would establish, almost simultaneously, a shadow government each time the Americans established a native government." (20:32) While not totally effective, this method at least identified some of the guerrilla's centers of gravity (i.e., the populace and their logistics).

The Army finally settled on two means of defeating the guerrillas: to capture or kill their leader Emilio Aguinaldo; and "Benevolent Pacification" combined with zones of protection. Aguinaldo was captured in a daring plan using Maccabebe scouts. The effect of his capture seriously damaged the Revolutionaries, but guerrilla warfare continued in numerous provinces. (16:175) This showed that the Army had learned the lesson that a center of gravity of guerrilla movements can sometimes be a strong charismatic leader.

The other successful tactic the Army employed was storming and destruction of villages. Afterward, the Army would immediately rebuild them, reopen their markets, construct new roads and set up schools. (16:177) Zones of protection were also established in which American forces would gather the populace into controlled areas. Food outside the area was destroyed or confiscated. Filipinos who would not enter the zones were considered the enemy. Americans patrolled aggressively outside the zone forcing the guerrillas to scatter. (16:177)

The study of the Army's pacification effort in the Philippines offers many lessons for military doctrine. A rural insurgency was defeated by an Army without a strong counterinsurgency doctrine or strategy. The Army learned by doing and was not tied to "any adherence to rigid doctrine or theories." (11:169) Individual officers ran their districts using the basic strategy of "Benevolent Pacification" and their own innovation. The lack of resources demanded they be innovative. Another key important factor leading to success was that the Army units stayed in their

original districts for much of the time of their tour of duty. This made it possible to establish contacts among the populace, and to gain an understanding of obstacles to pacification and how to overcome them. The final lesson was the importance of neutralizing key guerrilla leadership and the neutralization of guerrilla forces.

Vietnam War

Background

In reviewing the period immediately following World War II and ending with the Geneva Agreements in 1954, we can identify several important factors in respect to the long-range influence on U.S. involvement. Prior to 1954 the United States had already established a precedence for assistance in Vietnam. This assistance was channeled primarily through the French government (One Billion dollars had been provided by July 1954). This support was provided in part because the French had fought side by side American troops in Korea. "During the Dien Bien Phu crisis in 1954, the United States was prepared to intervene militarily in support of French forces. The objections of Great Britain, the unwillingness of the French to grant complete independence to Vietnam, and the serious questions raised by congressional and military officers precluded U.S. military involvement at that time." (3:31-35) In addition, the 1954 Geneva Agreements provided for the temporary partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel creating North and South Vietnam; imposed regulations on foreign military personnel and bases; provided for countrywide elections in 1956; established an International Control Commission to supervise the implementation of the agreements; and provided for a period of free movement between north or south. (16:199) The Agreements also created the environment and forces that attracted direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam because it provided a legal basis for intervening. The eventual French defeat and withdrawal from Indochina was another factor that lead to long term involvement in Vietnam. The French defeat led to the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) at the insistence of the United States. The SEATO Treaty, although falling short of commitments provided for in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), did provide a legal instrument for active American participation in Southeast Asia. Briefly, the treaty provided for joint action against armed attack on any territory in the area (including Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos). (16:199)

Last and perhaps the most important was President Dwight D. Eisenhower's letter to

President Diem in South Vietnam in October of 1954. In his letter the president expressed "grave concern regarding the future of the country, weakened by a long and exhausting war, and faced with enemies without and by their servient collaborators within." (8:456-457) The president concluded the letter by offering U.S. aid directly to the South Vietnamese government, in essence supplanting the French as the main support of the government. (16:200)

Some historians believe that Ho Chi Minh was convinced that the South would not be able to form a stable government. This belief was linked to the perception that Diem's policies were alienating the population. Even with the election deadline passing Hanoi counseled moderation, believing Diem would fall through his own devices. However, by 1957 North Vietnam realized that unification would only come about through force. By 1963, Diem's ineffective implementation of land reform, corruption, and treatment of the Buddhist's had alienated the population. This culminated in the coup d' etat in 1963 and the death of Diem (a coup which the U.S. sanctioned). The downfall of the Diem regime ushered in a period of coup followed by countercoup, creating instability and allowing the increased control of the countryside by the Vietcong. The political instability continued until June 1965, when the Armed Forces Council, the select group of generals controlling the state and government, established an all military National Leadership Committee. Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky became the prime minister. General Nguyen Van Thieu became chief of state. From the Ky period, the nature of the war had changed. The Vietcong had demonstrated their ability to attack and in most cases, succeed in defeating South Vietnamese forces. "The political infighting compounded the problems within the South Vietnamese Army. By the end of 1965 most insiders felt that the South Vietnamese government was on the verge of military defeat." (16:205)

It's within this context that the U.S. involvement must be viewed. From the end of 1964 the South Vietnamese government was faced with its most serious crisis. It was also during 1964, however, that the United States became involved in a series of decisions that led to the commitment of U.S. ground troops to South Vietnam and for all practical purposes provided a temporary solution to the crisis in military inability of the South Vietnamese. (16:201)

Although there were over 23,000 U.S. personnel in South Vietnam by 1964, the United States had maintained that its role was purely advisory and that it was only an indirect participant. In the summer of 1964, North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the U.S. destroyer (USS Maddox.). The United States government then approved retaliatory air strikes against fuel and port facilities on North Vietnam. Subsequently, the Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution by a vote of 414 to 0 in the House and 88 to 2 in the Senate. In essence, this resolution granted President Johnson great latitude in fashioning a military response in the conflict in Southeast Asia. Thus, a major shift in the administration's attitude was a result of the events in the summer of 1964 associated with the Gulf of Tonkin. This shift was signaled by the start of bombing attacks on the North and a dramatic increase in the number of U.S. troops in 1965, whose role now included ground combat operations. Certainly, the declining ability of the South Vietnamese Army, the desire to check worldwide communist aggression, and the resulting instability of the Ky government were also basic reasons for the reassessment of the U.S. role. The first step towards Americanization of the war had begun and by 1965 the war had become an American and Vietnamese war. (16:206) Now let us look at the political/military situation.

Political/Military Situation

The political/military situation during the Vietnam war was very complex. Three presidents were deeply involved in directing American policy in Vietnam. Kennedy, expanding from the ground work laid by Eisenhower, increased American involvement, committing over 16,000 American advisors by the time of his death. President Johnson dramatically increased the scope, committing combat troops (eventually numbering over 500,000) to South Vietnam. (16:79) Nixon came into office committed to a program of Vietnamization aimed at eventually ending the American role. Certain similarities characterized the policies of the different administrations. These were, the tension between the White House and Pentagon, and viewing the conflict from a global perspective. Domestic reaction to this was another key aspect of the Vietnam War. Let us take a

closer look at those similarities.

Initially, most Americans and their leadership supported America's role in Vietnam. "Even at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the first commitment of American combat troops in 1965, there was considerable support for Lyndon Johnson's policies." (16:87) Gradually the support of the home front eroded. By 1966, questions were being raised by journalists and then Congress about American policy in Vietnam. A major debate on Vietnam took place in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Demonstrations were held in Washington D.C. and other locations. After the 1968 Tet Offensive the U.S. and South Vietnamese had effectively defeated the Viet Cong, but the public believed the war was unwinnable. The North Vietnamese effectively identified the key U.S. center of gravity—public opinion.

The U.S. "World View" at that time — the perception of a monolithic communist threat—prevented the nation's leaders from accurately assessing the situation. Well, into the 1960's the administrations continued to view the Soviet Union as the major threat to national security. This view was reinforced by the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the subsequent Soviet policy to match and surpass the United States in strategic capability. Only a very few people recognized the emerging threats to the United States in non-European areas. The focus of the military remained fixed on the grand battles in Europe against the Soviet Union. (16:141) "Even though all of America's military conflicts since W.W.II have been outside Europe, the Army and the nation have invariably refocused their concerns after these conflicts upon the defense of Western Europe. And doctrine for the postwar Army has centered on a European-type battlefield." (5:46)

As David Halberstam points out, the American view of the world determines its foreign policy, which in turn provided the strategic guidelines for America's military posture. (6:31) Unfortunately, the American view of communism remained basically unchanged over a decade of major change in the international field. "Thus according to Halberstam, our view of southeast Asian turmoil was guided more by 1950's perspectives than 1960's realities." (16:141)

"The essence of good foreign policy is constant re-examination. The world changes and both domestic perceptions of the world and domestic perceptions of national political possibilities changes. It was one thing to base a policy in Southeast Asia on total anti-communism in the early 1950's when the Korean war was being fought and when the French Indo-China war was still at its height, when there was, on the surface at least, some evidence of communist monolith, and when the United states at home was becoming locked into the harshest of the McCarthy tensions. But it was another thing to accept these policies quite so easily in 1961...when both the world and the United States were very different. By 1961 the schism in the Communist world was clearly apparent: Khruschev had removed his technicians and engineers from China." (6:121)

The involvement in Vietnam was, therefore, primarily a reaction to the American perception of the grand design of a communist monolith. In this respect, a number of "bright" young men, according to Halberstam, intellectually rationalized the policy of containing communism, while other classic intellectuals took a passive role, not questioning U.S. policy. This concept of the communist monolith led the United States to fight a limited war. A limited war was deemed necessary, because it was felt that the Chinese would never allow North Vietnam to be defeated by American forces. The experience of the Korean war was not lost on most American commanders and civilian policy makers. As Sam C. Sarkesian points out in America's Forgotten Wars, the Vietcong and North Vietnam viewed the conflict as total war. "To them it was a matter of survival. Therefore the war was asymmetrical, with the psychological advantage in the hands of the North Vietnamese." (16-144) Unfortunately, the political-military establishment of the United States did not recognize that the world was in transition. This transition was demonstrated by a ground swell of nationalism in Asia and Africa along with the use of unconventional warfare. Thus, the American leadership could not identify the true centers of gravity of the enemy, nor could they articulate how political and military objectives meshed with one another. (16:73)

Tension between the White House and the Pentagon prevailed throughout most of the Vietnam war. The tension should be viewed in the context of the larger strains in civil-military relations in the 1950's and 1960's. A powerful peacetime military establishment was something new in post-World War II American life, and civilian leaders were uncertain how to handle it. They recognized the necessity of military power in an era of global conflict, but they feared the

possibility of rising military influence within the government. An example that seemed to symbolize the dangers was Douglas MacArthur's relief because of his defiance of civilian authority during the Korean War. Former general and president Dwight D. Eisenhower waged open warfare with his Joint Chiefs, and civil-military tension emerged full-blown in the Kennedy years. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's efforts to master and change the Pentagon budget process set off a near revolt within the military. Civilian and military leaders were sharply divided over the handling of such issues as the Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. (7:326)

Suspicious of the military and operating in an age of profound international tension with weaponry of enormous destructive power, civilians concentrated on keeping the generals and admirals in check. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara frequently visited the Navy's command center and even then had difficulty preventing provocative actions. This reinforced his determination to keep control tightly in his own hands. (14:570-578) "Johnson brought to the White House the Southern populist's suspicion of the military. Suspecting that the admirals and generals needed war to boost their reputations, he, like McNamara was determined to keep a close rein on them." (7:326) Nixon's character and personality made him distrust almost everyone. The consequence of this mistrust and tension manifested itself in the Vietnam conflict as a day-to-day intrusion into the tactical conduct of the war on a quite unprecedented scale. The end result was an unhappy combination of "high level indecision and micro-management." (15:96)

Civil-military tensions further complicated the formulation of strategy. From the start, there were profound differences among the Joint Chiefs of Staff and between them and the civilian leadership as to how and to what level the war should be fought. Unfortunately, these differences were never openly addressed, much less resolved. Furthermore, the decision-making process seems to have been rigged to produce consensus rather than controversy. As a result some major issues were raised but not answered; others were not even raised. The sort of intense debate that might have led to a reconsideration of the U.S. commitment in Vietnam or to form a more precise

strategy did not take place. The tensions and divisions that were left unresolved would provide the basis for bitter conflict as the war progressed. (7:326)

In summary, we see that although there was initial support for the American involvement in Vietnam, this support eroded and eventually divided the nation. Thus, the United States did not enjoy the support of the home front. Secondly, because American leadership still viewed the world in terms of the communist monolith it was not able to build a connection between political and military objectives. The government was afraid of escalation with China and Russia and only wanted to preserve the government of South Vietnam. The military was engaged in a limited war against a government that was waging total war. Lastly, there was a schism between the civilian and military leadership. This schism squelched discussion and possible solutions or alternative courses of action.

Conflict

Much has been written about the Vietnam war, in fact volumes have been written. Defying any particular patterns, the war between 1965-70 has best been described by S.L.A. Marshall: "The sure thing proves to be an empty bag. The seeming flash-in the pan turns into a major explosion. Elephant guns are used to bang away at rabbits. Tigers are hunted with popguns." (13:3) Some of the engagements that demonstrate and illustrate the character and complexity of the Vietnam War will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The fight at Ia Drang in October-November 1965 was a battle in which fairly large American units were in action against large elements of the enemy. Brigade-size units of the 1st Cavalry Division engaged regimental sized units of the enemy.

"It was during the week before Thanksgiving, amidst the scrub brush and stunted tree of the Ia Drang River Valley in the western sector of Pleiku Province along the Cambodian border, that the war changed (for the moment) drastically. For the first time regular North Vietnamese regiments, controlled by division size headquarters, engaged in a conventional contest with U.S. Forces. The 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry 1st Cavalry

Division (Airmobile) took the lead in this battle." (2:3)

This battle became one of maneuver and counter maneuver. The North Vietnamese were trying to outflank elements of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division. "The battle evolved into fierce firefights between platoons and companies. Artillery was used in close support to ward off enemy units. Enemy fire was so heavy at times that helicopters could not land at various landing zones." (16:210) "The enemy eventually withdrew from the area after unsuccessfully trying to overrun an isolated American unit and penetrate defense perimeters." (16:211) Artillery, tactical air, and B-52 strikes, turned the area into a death trap for the enemy. American forces captured large quantities of weapons and ammunitions, and killed an estimated 1200 enemy troops, and took 6 prisoners. However, it was costly to American forces, who suffered 79 killed and 121 wounded. (16:211)

In another military region, classic Vietcong ambushes occurred along Highway 1 (the primary north-south route in South Vietnam) and numerous other locations throughout the country. "Highway 1 dropped sharply to a stream bend and then rose to a gently rolling plateau west of Xuan Loc. A dirt road running north and south intersected National Highway 1 at this point with low hills rising only 10 to 20 meters above the road on both sides." (2:43) One side of the road was covered by tall grass with a banana grove lining the other side of the road. The concealment offered good position for the Vietcong's main force. "The Vietcong ambush was prepared with heaving weapons at both ends of the killing zone -- in this case 75-mm recoilless rifles. Along the killing zone, heavy machine guns were scattered for use against helicopters and jets." (16:211) This ambush and other smaller ambushes bled and attrited U.S. forces. In populated areas, it was difficult to distinguish between the enemy and the peasants. Finding enemy units was even harder, and if found, massive firepower was usually used against them. In the process many civilians were killed and a lot of collateral damage occurred. This did little to maintain sympathy for the South Vietnamese government or American forces with the local South Vietnamese populace. (17:255)

The U. S. Marines also had to contend with a hit and run enemy and thus, developed their own way of dealing with the enemy. "After a period in which Marine Captain Jim Cooper's unit conducted repeated sweeps, patrols, and attempted ambushes, Cooper became frustrated at his inability to separate the guerrillas from the population in the hamlet of Thanh My Trung;" (9:173) "He decided to deploy his Marines inside the hamlet and told the people they would be protected from the VC, for he was there to stay. Cooper increased the number of night patrols and ambushes and brought the villages' paramilitary Popular Forces (PF) under his wing, gradually forcing the local force to assume a greater responsibility for village security." (9:173) In time the PF's along with the Marines, were conducting night patrols in the area surrounding the village, stalking the VC, setting ambushes, and disrupting the insurgents. In the end, the VC abandoned the village.

The last example I will use to show the nature of the conflict in Vietnam was the war conducted by American Special Forces. "While known mostly for their work among the Montagnards, special forces teams operated in a number of areas and conducted many types of operations, primarily aimed at the unconventional dimension of wars: mobile strike operations, border surveillance, long-range reconnaissance, and counterrevolutionary operations against the enemy. One of the most important missions was the establishment of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group." (6:214) The purpose of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group was to set up base camps among the various minority ethnic groups in Vietnam, for the purpose of conducting paramilitary operations against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. Special forces were well suited to these types of operations. (16:214) An examination of what American forces did or did not learn is now required.

Lessons Learned

It is difficult to sum up the counterrevolutionary lessons learned in such a complex and multidimensional conflict as the Vietnam War. Yet, after analysis, a number of points can be seen.

One of the most telling problems was the lack of appreciation of the character and costs of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary war by many of America's political and military leaders. Lacking a sense of history and possessing a misconception of the Hanoi regime, most leaders felt that American technology and military strength were sufficient to defeat a Third World peasant society. (16:217)

Doctrine also reflected the absence of emphasis on counterinsurgency. As Sam C. Sarkesian pointed out; "Regardless of the tactical posture adopted by American forces, the main purpose remained to find the enemy and destroy him. The idea of pacification and civil-military operations, while receiving a lot of lip service and verbal commitment, were not carried out with the same effort and enthusiasm as conventional operations." (16:209) This fact is illustrated by the Army's development of a study, Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan for Counterinsurgency, published on 15 September 1961. The Army claimed this to be a milestone. The plan was a three phased conceptual outline for counterinsurgency, however, they turned this plan over to the South Vietnamese Army for execution. An Army the U.S. military considered ineffective and in some cases inept. This set the tone for our commitment to counterinsurgency/counterrevolutionary doctrine.

Some important lessons were learned, however. As pointed out in previous discussions, these lessons were learned at the tactical level, but never made it up the chain of command to become instituted as doctrine. The reason for this was that the American leadership perceived these conflicts as minor irritants not requiring the full application of resources. The lack of resources determined, in some instances, how doctrine evolved. In Vietnam some of these "lessons" were perceived as a threat to existing force structure. For example, the efforts of Marine Captain John Cooper with the Marine Combined Action Platoons (CAPS) produced significant results. "A DOD report gave CAP-protected villages a much higher security rating than areas for all of the villages in Army's I Corps area." (9:174) Furthermore there was a direct correlation between the time a CAP stayed in a village and the degree of security achieved. The CAP protected villages' security progressed twice as fast as villages occupied by the PF's alone. "The

Army's reaction to the CAP program was ill-disguised disappointment, if not outright disapproval, from the top down. Army General Harry Kinnard was "absolutely disgusted" with the Marines. He did everything he could to drag them out and get them to fight. (9:175) What the Army did not realize was that by working, living, and fighting with the villagers the CAP program was actually working towards taking control of the countryside away from the Vietcong. Conversely, the Marine Corps strongly objected to the Army's determination to fight the guerrillas by staging decisive battles along the ^NTannerberg design. (7:321) As we can see, however, an important counterinsurgency doctrinal lesson had been learned and improved upon at the tactical level, but was dismissed by the operational commanders.

Another important lesson was learned by the Special Forces in the establishment of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG.) "The Green Berets worked hand in hand with the people to fortify their village; they constructed shelters, an early-warning system, and closely regulated the movement of people in and out of the area. Dispensaries were built, and local volunteers were armed and trained to help protect the village from attack by guerrillas. A small group of men from the village were designated as a "strike force." (9:70-71) The initial results were very promising, and the program slowly spread like an "oil spot." Yet even as the program was achieving its greatest triumph, it was to undergo a change that would strip it of its success.

Due to Army politics and distrust of Special Forces, the Army decided to make changes to the CIDG program. First, the Army decided to turn the CIDG program over to the South Vietnamese Special Forces. The transfer was done in an incompetent manner. For example, the South Vietnamese Special Forces received little or no training. Additionally, they were not effectively briefed on the importance of the program. One South Vietnamese official later claimed that the most serious damage resulting from the transfer was that it fostered among the villages "the mentality of dependence on the army and the government for defense of the villages, and not their own." The people therefore stood on the sidelines, uninvolved and uncommitted. This was in complete contravention of what the CIDG was trying to accomplish. The South Vietnamese Special Forces were also ill-equipped to assume the responsibilities of their American counterparts.

The Vietnamese Special Forces were poorly trained, incompetently led and insensitive to the needs of the population. The Vietnamese Special Forces also lacked credibility with the local populace because some of them had committed atrocities against their own countrymen. As the CIDG program slowly collapsed, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) detailed its support of the Border Surveillance Program. This program intended to take the Special Forces strike teams from the CIDG program and use them to attack VC base camps and interdict the infiltration of men and supplies from the North. The forces would also be used in support of regular South Vietnamese Army forces engaged in large scale conventional operations. (9:72) "The preferred Army mission for Special Forces was not counterinsurgency but unconventional warfare where they could better support traditional, conventional operations." (9:74) As we can see, an important doctrinal lesson was learned in the CIDG pacification program, but it was learned at the tactical level (the war fighters). The program was considered a waste of time by senior commanders.

Conclusion

While this report covers distinctly different historical periods, there are also similarities that can help develop historical lessons. These historical lessons can then be translated into operational doctrine. Although one always wants to be careful in drawing conclusions, certain patterns do arise. These patterns are: isolate the guerrillas from the local populace; establish districts or zones of control; implement effective pacification/population control within the district or villages; train and instruct the local populace to defend themselves; conduct strong counterguerrilla operations with the local populace; enlist the support of the people; demonstrate to the people that your presence will be there for them until they are ready to defend themselves (vice using sweeping operations in which you only have intermittent contact with them); identify the centers of gravity of the guerrillas; and plan operations to neutralize those centers of gravity.

From a political/military perspective we can see that American military and civilian planners must develop a sense of history and keen analytical ability concerning the political and military ramifications of involvement in a counterrevolutionary war. Effective presidential, military, and civilian leadership must be maintained throughout the course of the counterrevolutionary involvement, with a strong correlation between political and military objectives. Additionally, these leaders must be able to identify the centers of gravity of the counterrevolutionaries, and must also understand that these centers may change. As the centers of gravity change, the American leadership must continually reassess the validity of using American forces to neutralize the centers of gravity. For example, if the center of gravity has changed from control of the rural areas to a political and propaganda war, will the use of ground forces still be effective? Battles and engagements may be won, but they will be incidental to the political-psychological consequences. Finally, counterrevolutionary warfare is probably the most difficult and exasperating conflict for a democratic society, consequently it should not be undertaken lightly. It requires military and civilian thinking that is not bound to traditional solutions, conventional organizations, or operations.

Have we learned our lessons? I do not think so. As pointed out previously, tactical

battlefield commanders developed effective counterrevolutionary tactics to use against their adversaries. Possibly, because these lessons have never been translated into counterrevolutionary doctrine. The reason these lessons have never been translated into doctrine is because: there are few individuals who understand it, and those who do have difficulty translating it into military doctrine; the persistence of a conventional posture and orientation based on the threat of a European war; the belief that a focus on counterrevolutionary conflict would threaten force structure (the Vietnam War for example); the tendency to overlook tactical lessons that worked in conflicts such as the Second Seminole and Philippine Wars. Russell F. Weigley states in his History of the United States Army: "Each new experience with irregular warfare has required, then, that appropriate techniques be learned all over again." (19:161) The American military leadership preoccupation with the grand battles of the past coupled with the fact that the premises of the American democracy (and its desire for a quick solution) create a military that is ill suited to deal with counterrevolutionary warfare. It has also been shown that our civilian leadership has only a limited understanding of these conflicts, and our military leadership continually downplays their significance. So what do we do? Let us examine approaches to developing such a strategy.

Wars of insurgency and counterrevolution are the most likely type of conflict we will face. Conflicts in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan demonstrate this pattern. "The United States must develop a policy aimed at responding to low-intensity conflict for a number of reasons important to American national interests." (16:244) In this respect, a realistic policy must evaluate various elements of American political policy and design a military strategy and doctrine based on this assessment. (16:244) There are several factors to consider. They include: the concept of low-intensity conflicts must be explained clearly, and a single clear and coherent policy must be developed; an existing faction or government to which we are considering providing support must have the potential to develop a representative system and must be sensitive to the causes of revolution; insurgency policy does not automatically mean that U.S. troops must be committed--economic assistance, training, or low-visibility operations may be better courses of action; any deployment of U.S. troops will require the support of the American people, especially for

protracted deployments; moral and ethical behavior in insurgency/counterrevolutionary war must be observed in order to maintain the support of the people; civilian and military planners must develop a sense of history and keen analytical ability; and lastly given the nature of a democratic society the conflict may run so contrary to our values that we must question any involvement in this respect. (16:245-247) Naturally, deciding these issues will require a lively debate, something that was absent prior to U.S. involvement in these three conflicts. However, no involvement in these types of conflicts may prove more costly in the long run.

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